Differences in the impact of COVID-19 on mental health and help-seeking behaviour across young people accessing Foundry services throughout the pandemic

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· F O U N D R Y ·

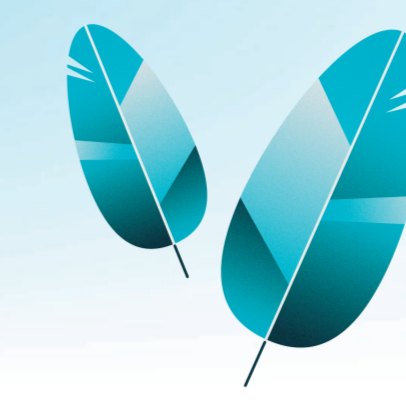**Contact information**
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Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic changed the landscape of integrated youth services (IYS), with organizations like Foundry launching virtual services.

Foundry is a network of IYS centres in the province of British Columbia, Canada, that is transforming how young people (ages 12-24) access health and social services. With the declaration of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, Foundry quickly adapted to offer virtual services in two ways: (1) through physical Foundry centres and (2) through the launch of a provincial service platform, Foundry Virtual BC. While studies have found significant negative impacts of COVID-19 on youth mental health,[1] there was limited information about if youth were delaying seeking support at IYS because of it; specifically, when both virtual and in-person services are available.

Objectives

The goal of this study was to understand how the pandemic was impacting youth in seeking IYS during the pandemic. There were three key objectives:

1. Understand the demographic differences between youth who sought services virtually compared to in-person during the COVID-19 pandemic.
2. Examine differences in the impact of COVID-19 on mental health and help-seeking behaviours between youth seeking virtual compared to in-person service.
3. Explore changes in the impact of COVID-19 on self-reported youth mental health over time.

Methods

Data were collected using two cross-sectional, anonymous surveys administered to youth who accessed IYS through Foundry (in-person or virtual).

There were two different samples and time periods for data collection:
- Sample 1 included 201 youth; collected from Mar-Jun 2021.
- Sample 2 included 554 youth; collected from Nov 2021-Jan 2022.
- Data were stratified and analyzed by time period; access modality (in-person or virtual); and age, gender and ethnicity.
- T-tests were used for continuous variables and Fisher's exact test (FET) was used for comparisons between strata.
- Youth were asked to rate their mental health since the outbreak of COVID-19 and whether or not they delayed seeking support from Foundry due to COVID-19 concerns.

Participants

SAMPLE 1

GENDER
Gender-diverse 14.3%
Boy/Man 20.4%
Girl/Woman 65.3%

SAMPLE 2

GENDER
Gender-diverse 25.7%
Boy/Man 21%
Girl/Woman 53.3%

AGE
Average: 18.52 (SD 3.40)

AGE
Average: 19.05 (SD 3.10)

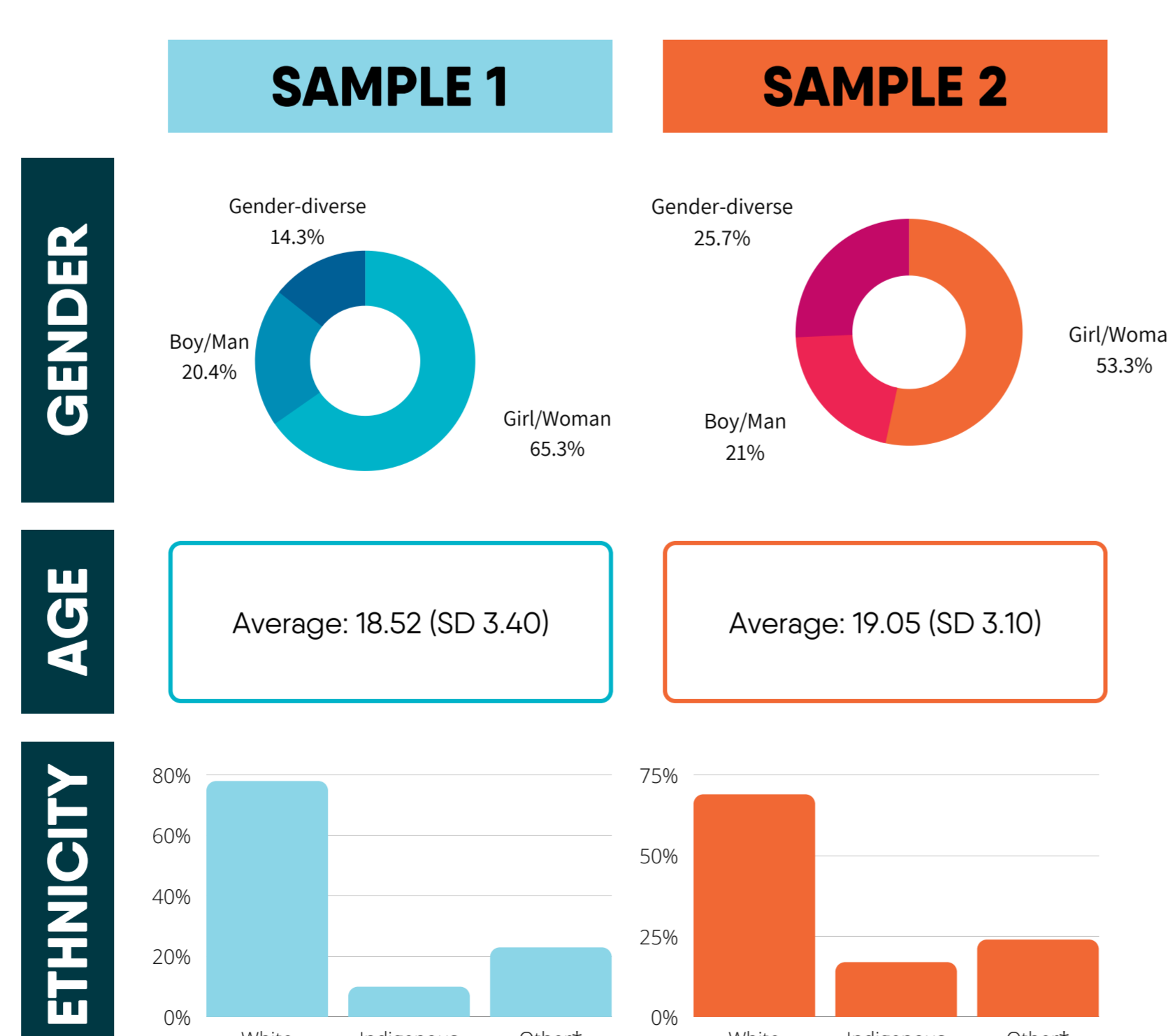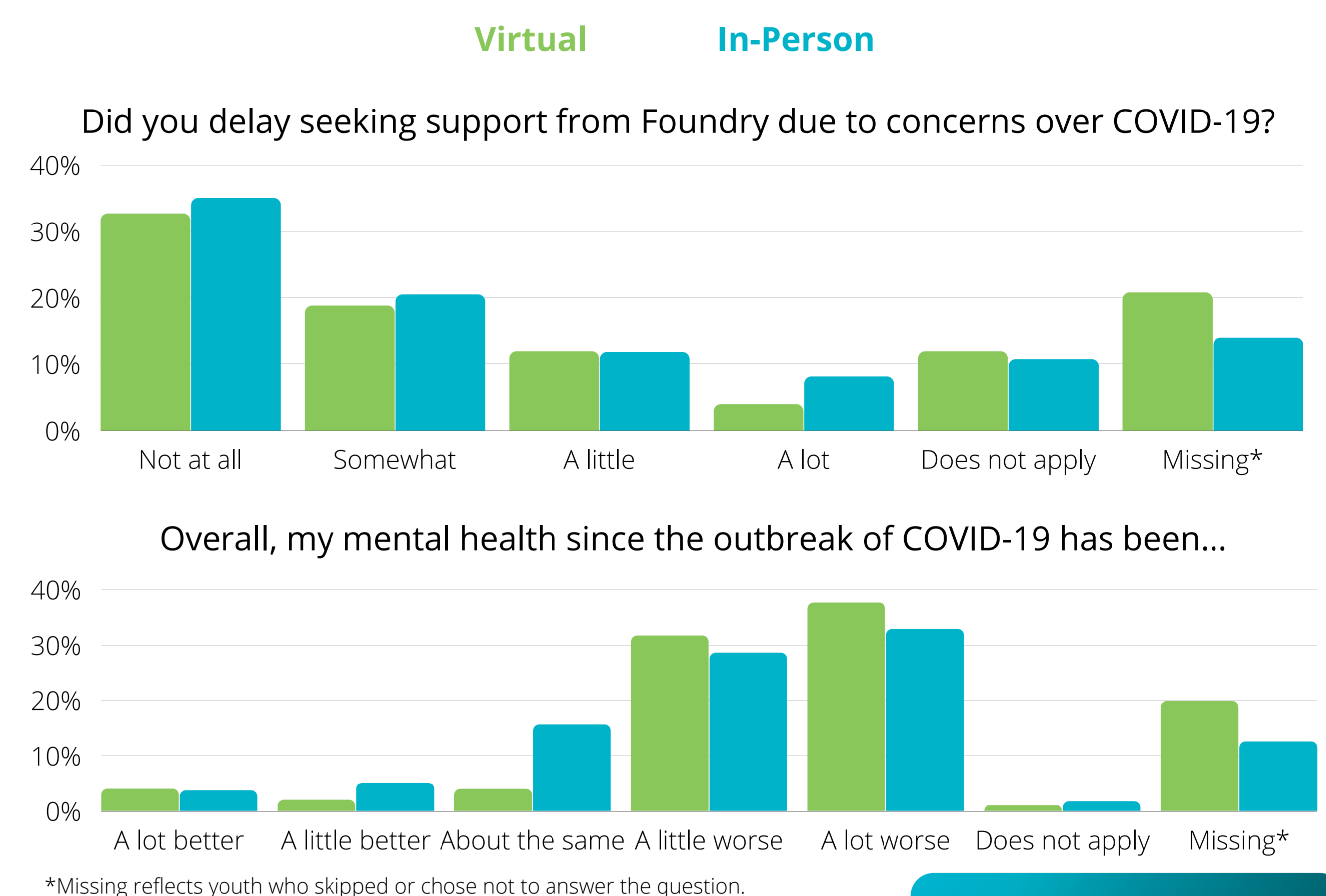**ETHNICITY** (White, Indigenous, Other*)

Figure Notes: Youth were able to select more than one response for gender and ethnicity/cultural background. Percentages reflect all selections and may not add to 100%. "Other" includes Other as well as Arab, Black, Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, Korean, Latin American, South Asian, Southeast Asian, West Asian and Prefer not to answer.

Results

There were several key differences between youth who accessed in-person and virtual services at Foundry during the pandemic:

- Youth who accessed services virtually were slightly older than those who accessed in-person (p = 0.013).
- Indigenous youth (youth who identify as First Nations, Métis or Inuit) were more likely to access services in-person than virtually (p = 0.011).
- Youth who accessed virtual were more likely to indicate that their mental health had gotten worse since the outbreak of COVID-19 (p = 0.015).
- Youth who accessed services in-person were more likely to indicate that they delayed seeking support because of the pandemic (p = 0.038).
- Youth in Sample 1 were more likely to indicate their mental health was worse because of COVID-19 than Sample 2 (p = 0.001).
- Youth in Sample 1 were more likely to indicate they delayed seeking services at Foundry because of COVID-19 than Sample 2. (p = <0.0001)

Virtual   In-Person

Did you delay seeking support from Foundry due to concerns over COVID-19?

(categories: Not at all, Somewhat, A little, A lot, Does not apply, Missing*)

Overall, my mental health since the outbreak of COVID-19 has been...

(categories: A lot better, A little better, About the same, A little worse, A lot worse, Does not apply, Missing*)

*Missing reflects youth who skipped or chose not to answer the question.

> "Having access to virtual services is very helpful."
> – Survey participant

Conclusion

These findings can help inform how IYS are offered to provide youth with access to the services they need as we emerge from a global pandemic.

Finding differences in the demographic profile of youth seeking virtual versus in-person services help Foundry and other IYS programs tailor approaches to better meet the needs of youth. Further research on the demographic differences between youth accessing virtual and in-person services would help provide insight into how to best adapt to serve these groups. As Canada moves into a long-term COVID-19 recovery phase,[2] we may continue to see improvements in mental health and help seeking. It is important to keep monitoring these trends as the COVID-19 landscape continues shifting.

> "I find it's easier for me to get overwhelmed and go into an anxiety attack faster than before COVID-19. I feel more alone and isolated since we are not allowed to see people or I'm scared to see people."
> –Survey participant

1. Marques de Miranda D, da Silva Athanasio B, Sena Oliveira AC, Simoes-E-Silva AC. How is COVID-19 pandemic impacting mental health of children and adolescents? International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction. 2020;51:101845.
2. Samji H, Dove N, Ames M, Barbic S, Sones M, Leadbeater B. Impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the health and well-being of young adults in British Columbia. 2021.

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